

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1 1. An apparatus comprising:
2 an electrically powered device having a key operating line; and
3 switching control circuitry to control usage of the electrically powered
4 device by interrupting continuity of the key operating line.

1 2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the at least one electrically
2 powered device includes a computer and alternatively a computer peripheral
3 device.

1 3. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising:
2 a controller to generate control signals including user control signals to
3 control the electrically powered device; and
4 a display, responsive to the user interface control signals, to interactively
5 prompt a user to provide user inputs to the controller, the user inputs including
6 (i) a designation of a selected group of electrically powered devices from the at
7 lease one electrically powered device and (ii) a prepayment method designation.

1 4. The apparatus of claim 2 further comprising an input/output
2 device coupled to the computer by the key operating control line through an
3 activator device, said switching control circuitry to control the activator device by
4 interrupting continuity between the input/output device and the computer.

1 5. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein the input/output device is a
2 keyboard and alternatively a mouse.

1 6. A system, comprising:

2 a plurality of computer and computer peripheral devices, the plurality of
3 computers including a controller interface computer which executes a controller
4 interface software module to generate control signals including user interface
5 control signals;

6 a display responsive to the user interface control signals and adapted to
7 interactively prompt a user to provide user inputs to the controller interface
8 computer, the user inputs including (i) a designation of a selected group of
9 devices from the plurality of computer and computer peripheral devices and (ii)
10 a prepayment method designation; and

11 switching control circuitry connected to each of the plurality of computer
12 and computer peripheral devices, the switching control circuitry, responsive to
13 the control signals, to control usage by interrupting continuity of at least one key
14 operating line of one or more of the plurality of the computer and computer
15 peripheral devices.

1 7. The system of claim 6 wherein the controller interface computer to
2 receive the user inputs, process the user inputs by establishing communication
3 with a remotely located device to request approval of a financial transaction, and
4 generate control signals in response to receiving approval.

1 8. The system of claim 6 wherein the key operating control line
2 controls the functionality of the one or more computer and computer peripheral
3 devices.

1 9. The system of claim 6 wherein the controller interface computer
2 may be operated remotely through a network to generate control signals
3 including user interface control signals.

1 10. A system comprising:
2 a vending machine including at least one electrically powered device;
3 a controller to generate control signals including user interface control
4 signals;
5 a display responsive to the user interface control signals to interactively
6 prompt a user to provide user inputs to the controller, the user inputs including
7 (i) a designation of a selected group of devices from the at least one electrically
8 powered device and (ii) a prepayment method designation; and
9 switching control circuitry connected to each of the at least one electrically
10 powered device of the vending machine, the switching control circuitry,
11 responsive to the control signals, to provide power to the at least one electrically
12 powered device to dispense an item.

1 11. The system of claim 10 wherein each electrically powered device is a
2 motor to control a corresponding dispensing mechanism.

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12. An apparatus to monitor usage of an electrically powered device, comprising:

- a circuit coupled to the device to provide a power output of the device;
- an analog to digital converter coupled to receive the power output and convert the same to digital form; and
- a controller to receive a user input, process the user input by establishing communication with a remotely located device to request approval of a financial transaction, and generate control signals in response to receiving approval, the controller receives the digital form of the power output and monitors the operation of the electrically powered device.

13. The apparatus of claim 12 further comprising a switching device coupled between the electrically powered device and a power source, said switching device to control power to the device, responsive to the control signals.

14. The apparatus of claim 12 wherein the controller includes a database of power profiles of the device and compares the digital form of the power output to the power profiles, said controller suspends charging for usage of the device if the digital form of the power output indicates a halt condition.

15. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein the database of power profiles includes normal operation power profiles, idle operation power profiles, and halt condition power profiles.

1 16. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein the controller continues to
2 suspend charging for usage of the device as long as the device is in halt
3 condition.

1 17. The apparatus of claim 13 wherein the switching device is a relay.

1 18. The apparatus of claim 12 wherein the circuit is a current to voltage
2 converter and alternatively an ammeter.

1 19. The apparatus of claim 12 wherein the electrically powered device is
2 copier and alternatively a laser printer.